

Bulletin of The Detroit Institute of Arts

Of the City of Detroit

Vol. XI

JANUARY 1930

No. 4



EQUESTRIAN STATUETTE
PIETRO TACCA
FLORENCE, 1580-1650

AN ITALIAN EQUESTRIAN STATUETTE

Although Italian sculpture as a whole is better represented in our collection than in most American museums, one of its most characteristic branches could hitherto be shown in but a few and rather unimportant examples. We refer to the small works in bronze, justly counted among the most excellent productions of the plastic art of the Renaissance. They are, for this very fact, much sought after by collectors and consequently are not easily obtainable in the art market. It thus happens that so far we have nothing from the fifteenth century, a time when the modelling and casting of small bronze figures reached the summit of perfection in the works of such masters as Pollaiuolo and Bertoldo of Florence and Riccio of Padua, and we cannot claim that the representation of sixteenth century bronze art is much better. There is no work here by any of the masters of northern Italy, where the art of bronze casting attained consummate perfection in the exquisite creations of the Paduan goldsmith, Francesco di Sant'Agata. Nor are the two specimens of bronze works by Giovanni da Bologna¹, owned by the museum, sufficient to give an adequate idea of the art of this master, who, born in Douai but completely Italianized, became the leading sculptor of Florence in the latter part of the sixteenth century. The acquisition of the fine and noble statuette of a horseman will, to a certain extent, help in narrowing this gap in the collection, although it belongs to a period when the great bronze art of Italy was already on the verge of perishing.

Because of its very high qualities, the statuette had traditionally been regarded as a work of Giovanni da Bologna². This attribution, however, seems to be untenable even in view of the external features only. The man represented, apparently

a prince or general, wears what is clearly indicated as that curiously shaped, starched, or otherwise stiffened, collar, called in Spanish *golilla*, which we know from so many portraits by Velasquez and other contemporary painters. The presence of this detail gives us a very reliable *terminus post quem*, for the *golilla* owes its very origin to the endeavor of the Spanish government at the outset of King Philip IV's reign for reform and economy. One of the court's first edicts was that of January 11, 1623, forbidding the hitherto fashionable large lace ruffs and replacing them by the straight and simple *golillas* then especially designed. Even the ladies had to submit to similar restrictions. "Those Dutch frills," wrote Céspedes, the Spanish court historian, "had cost the country several millions a year; the foreigners helped themselves to our silver, leaving us, as to savages, our stupid love of finery."³ The *golilla* soon conquered fashionable society all over Europe, especially in the Catholic countries of the south. It remained, with some slight modifications, for several decades and can still be seen in portraits by Velasquez from the fifties. However, what matters here is the fact that it was unknown before 1623, so that its presence alone on our statuette precludes the authorship of Giovanni da Bologna, who died in 1608. The later date of the bronze figure (around 1625) is further sustained by the very short and pointed beard of the man—a fashion in full vogue during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648)—by the form of the armour and, finally, by the rendering of the hair and other details, more "picturesque" than with Giambologna.

As to the question of the identity of the artist, there is no doubt that he was an Italian and, more exactly, a follower of Giambologna, for the connec-

1. *The Rape of the Sabines* and the *Lion Attacking a Horse*, the latter group, according to its signature, cast and chased by Giambologna's pupil, Antonio Susini.

2. W. Bode, *Die Italienischen Bronze Statuetten der Renaissance*, Berlin, Vol. III, p. 3.

3. Quoted from Carl Justi, *Diego Velasquez*, English edition, London, 1889, p. 108.

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tion of the statuette with the latter's famous equestrian statue of Cosimo I in Florence is quite obvious. Not only are horse and rider almost identical in their position, but we can observe in the small work the same curious shortness of the horse that characterizes the large statue. This feature of Bologna's monument has been attributed to the master's endeavor to continue rather than to break up the row of sculptural works by Michelangelo, Donatello and others placed in front of the Palazzo Vecchio as an ideal division of the two incongruent squares forming the Piazza della Signoria. If this should be true, we might suppose that our statuette, too, was the model for a large monument designed for a similar location. It is by the simple process of elimination that we arrive at Pietro Tacca as the probable author of our bronze. Tacca, born about 1577, received his training under Giambologna and was, in several instances, a collaborator of the master, some of whose works he finished after the latter's death, (for example, the equestrian statue of Grand Duke Ferdinando I on Piazza della SS. Annunziata in Florence). He lived until 1640 and was therefore the only one of the immediate followers of Bologna active in the twenties, since all the other prominent pupils and collaborators of the master

had died before that time (Landini in 1594, Portigiani in 1602, Francavilla in 1618). The supposition that Tacca was the maker of our bronze is further corroborated by comparison with authentic works by his hand, especially the two small bronze horses—one with the figure of a rider—in the Bargello at Florence, models for an equestrian statue of King Louis XIII of France which was never executed.

The identification of the horseman, if such should be established, might give a further clue to the exact dating of the bronze. There is a certain possibility that the rider, with his baton, is Ambrogio Spinola, to whose portraits by Rubens and Velasquez he shows some resemblance. The Genoese marchese, commander of the Spanish forces in the Netherlands, became especially famous through his conquest of Breda in 1625, so that it seems quite possible that shortly afterward a monument was planned in his honor for which our statuette was the model. Be that as it may, the bronze, with its noble conception, its delicate modelling, the treatment of its surface, rich in texture and not over-polished, and last, but not least, its beautiful patina, is certainly an excellent addition to and the finest specimen of its kind in the collection.

WALTER HEIL.

THE BIRTH OF VENUS BY BOUCHER

Whatever may have been the complaints of Diderot and other predecessors of the French Revolution and of Anglo-Saxon Puritans against the great Rococo painters of the Louis XV period, especially Boucher, it cannot be denied that these artists represented a brilliant age of a highly developed and harmonious philosophy of life, of excellent traditions in taste and culture and of an extraordinary artistic imagination. In this respect the following generations throughout the nineteenth century had nothing equal to offer. And the Puritans—if we except the one outsider, William Blake—while greater perhaps in their religious fervour, were so barren of all artistic fantasy that they could not even produce a religious art of the type of the Baroque school of Italy and Spain, not to mention that of the Middle Ages.

The French eighteenth century painters, on the other hand, while recognizing that the heavens were depopulated of the saints of earlier epochs, still were able to fill them with the enchanting personifications of Greek and Roman mythology, giving the formal classical spirit of the time of Poussin a joyful new life of extraordinary grace and agility—while in the art of the nineteenth century the heavens became entirely empty.

No representative collection of French eighteenth century art can do without François Boucher, the greatest imaginative force in the decorative arts, who gave new impulse to the theatre as well as to the art of the weavers, potters and engravers: great designer and master of easel and wall paintings, of portraits, landscapes and, above all, of those vast compositions designed for the palaces of the newly risen wealthy bourgeoisie of Paris, in which myriad groups of exquisitely drawn nude figures fill infinite space.

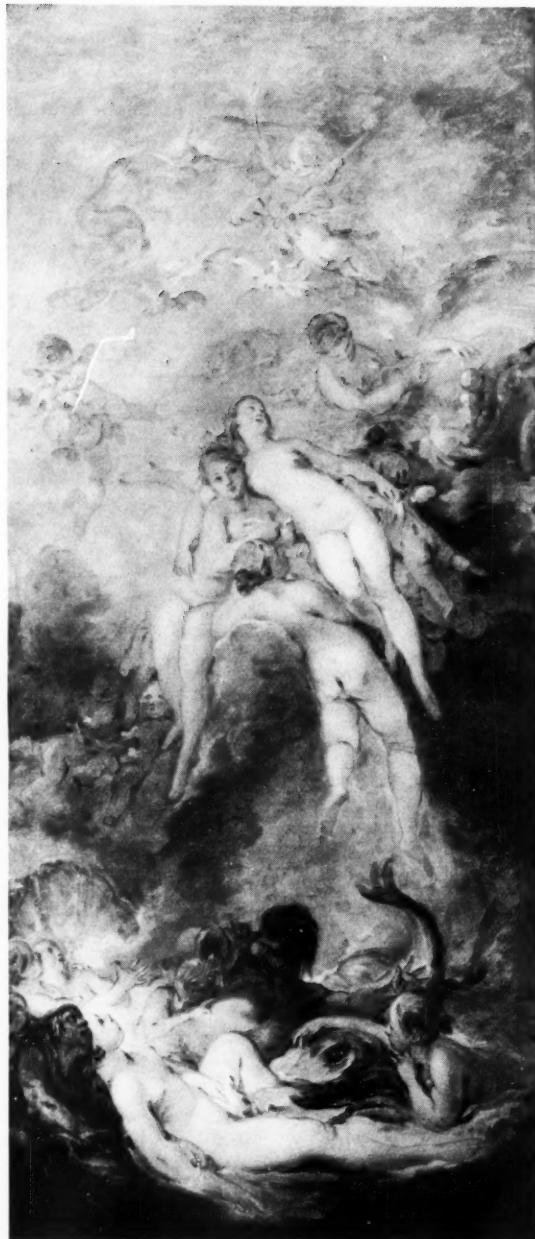
Through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Whitcomb, an enchanting work of this type has come into the pos-

session of the Art Institute. Despising the symmetry of the compositions of the earlier periods, but harmoniously balancing the masses of figures in a rhythmic arrangement of colour and line, Boucher empties his lavish cornucopia of fantasy. He creates a composition woven of water, air and light in which the figures float in the midst of these fluid elements as if born in them. Nude figures of maidens, men and children rest easily upon the waves, rise securely over clouds and disappear in the farthest distance, forming chains of human bodies, yet loosely attached to the elements and self-conscious of their beauty and grace as only earth-born figures can be. Deep bluish-green glows the sea in the foreground, where dolphins play with the nymphs and silvery white shells rise from the depths; transparent clouds carry up to heaven a sweet burden of three luminous nude graces towards a golden throne; and high in the light blue sky cupids disport themselves, swinging pink ribbons and holding torches of love, while white doves flutter everywhere between heaven and earth.

What does the scene represent? Who can tell? It may be the birth of Venus, or Love and the Three Graces, or whatever may have come into Boucher's mind when in bacchanalian mood he produced this charming creation. It is of no importance; enough, that the subject expresses the enchantment of those who can live in the elements without the heavy burden of earth, that it is the fulfillment of those wishes which ascend toward the freedom of the pure air and the light-blue, white-clouded sky of spring.

The art of Boucher developed from the Italian Baroque masters with whom he became acquainted through his master, François Lemoine, and later through a stay in Italy. Yet his art has something which is entirely missing in the Italian wall painters with their heavy chiaroscuro effects, that transparent atmosphere

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THE BIRTH OF VENUS
FRANCOIS BOUCHER
GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. EDGAR B. WHITCOMB

and flower-like perfume which became characteristic of French art largely through his impetus. Without him, the art of his great pupil, Fragonard, and also that of the best modern masters of France, would not have been possible.

Our picture comes from the Paris collection of Lorenzo Merino and is said to have belonged originally to the famous series of four panels now in the Wallace collection and painted for the boudoir of Madame de Pompadour at the Hotel de l'Arsenal in 1754. These panels measure each $64\frac{1}{2}$ x $32\frac{1}{2}$ inches, while ours is slightly different in size: $69\frac{1}{2}$ x 30 inches. It is also more free and sketchy in execution, which, perhaps, would have made it less valuable according to the judgment of Boucher and his contemporaries (those called by himself *du fini* were the most expensive ones)¹, but which from our modern point of view is an advantage. It shows to greater advantage the ease and spontaneity of his marvelously

unfaltering brush work and fortunately lacks that hardness of colour and enamel-like surface which his over-finished works, especially in his late period, sometimes have.

It is not impossible that our composition was intended as a fifth panel to the series, but for some unknown reason was not used. As the series of the Wallace collection represents scenes from the story of Venus (Venus' visit to Vulcan, Venus and Mars surprised by Vulcan, Cupid a captive, the judgment of Paris), the supposition that ours is the Birth of Venus would well accord with this. Certainly it is executed at the height of Boucher's art, at the beginning of the fifties, since we find in it all the elements of composition used in two of his grandest and most mature works, the *Rising and The Setting of the Sun*, in the Wallace collection, which were executed in 1753.

W. R. VALENTINER.

A CHINESE BRONZE YU

Among the few pieces shown in the recent loan exhibition of Chinese art that have been retained for the permanent collections of the Institute of Arts, the first to receive comment in the Bulletin will be the excellent bronze vessel of the type known as *yu*². It is a wine jar of dark silver bronze, oval in section, with a cover and a loop handle. The body, bulbous above the low foot, tapers upward in a smooth curve that is continued in the silhouette of the cover and terminates in a slight flare around its shoulder and in the two ears at its ends. Just below the cover, which fits over a wide flange inside the neck of the body, is a decorated band interrupted at the two ends of the vessel by vertically fixed rings to which the swinging handle, which gives the vessel a total height of nine and five-eighths inches, is attached. The upper halves of these rings are covered by the animal heads modelled in the

round, which are the terminals of the handle. On top of the cover is a cup-like device on which the cover stands as a goblet when inverted.

The decoration is simple and restrained. Two raised lines encircle the foot, and a third surrounds the body just below the handles. Around the neck of the vessel is a zone of ornament in low relief, containing two long-tailed birds against a cloud-and-thunder background on each long side. The birds face away from the handle rings toward an animal head boss in the center of each side. A pattern encircling the shoulder of the cover is similar, although the animal mask is flatter and more geometrical; and the design on the handle is in conformity with the rest of the decoration. Patches of the surface are covered with a heavy green patina.

One of the most interesting phases of the present study of ancient China is the

1. Pierre de Nolhac, *Boucher*, 1925, p. 82.

2. March, B., *A Loan Exhibition of Chinese Art*, Detroit, 1929. No. 44.

expansion of our ignorance. Some years ago it would have been easy to give definite symbolic explanations for the various elements of the design. Today, as tradition is being supplanted by knowledge, we must be more cautious. The heads on the handles may be rams and associated with the idea of a sacrificial victim. The animal head bosses on

cast, as is all the ornament, in the bronze. It is in archaic characters whose modern equivalents would probably give us the sentence, "*fu tso hsiung hsin pao tsun i*," which may be translated "Fu made [this *yu* for] Elder [brother?] Hsin, to be treasured as a sacred vessel." As names were indicated by the cyclical characters of birthdays rather than by in-



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BRONZE YU OR WINE VESSEL
CHOU. 1122-255 B. C.

the vessel's body resemble some figures identified as tigers. On the whole, however, it is probably wiser to say that while there was some symbolism in these decorations it is presently impossible to be positive in defining it.

In the bottom of the vessel and repeated inside the cover is an inscription,

dividual appellations, any idea of localizing the piece with reference to a single person must be abandoned immediately.

In the Chou period (1122-255 B. C.) when our piece was produced, a ritualistic culture prevailed that involved the use of numerous altars and symbols. On the religious side sacrifice was abundant

from the sovereign's worship of Heaven to the patriarch's offering to his ancestors. Heaven and Earth were supreme deities, and there were numerous other nature genii, some general, and some undoubtedly local. The multiplication of altars and of the demand for altar furniture is readily comprehensible. Bronze was the most prized material for sacrificial vessels and great numbers must have been made, although when Ch'in Shih Huang-ti in the third century set out to abolish the then decadent ritualism he destroyed much of the ritualistic apparatus. This and other causes materially reduced the number of vessels. Occasional pieces have been discovered in excavations through the centuries, and with the changes of recent decades the finds have been more numerous.

Gifts to a sovereign often took the form of bronze vessels, and bronzes similarly figured among the gifts of kings to especially favored subjects. Special vessels were likewise cast for ancestral altars to record such momentous events in family history as appointments to high office.

The *yu* was a vessel for fragrant black millet wine, and Yetts tells us¹ that "apparently vessels of this class, filled with aromatic spirit, figured among gifts bestowed by the king so that with it the recipient could worthily announce to his ancestors the royal favours."



INSCRIPTION CAST IN BRONZE YU

As might be expected under the circumstances, the best artists and craftsmen of the time lavished their skill on these ceremonial vessels. The art of bronze casting, including mastery of the *a cire perdue* or "waste wax" process, was highly developed at the beginning of the historic bronze age in China, and the fine pieces show extraordinary technical accomplishment as well as superb design.

BENJAMIN MARCH.

1. Yetts, W. Perceval, *Catalogue of the George Eumorfopoulos Collection of Chinese and Corean Bronzes, etc.* London, 1929. Vol. I, p. 49.

A PHILADELPHIA LOWBOY IN THE CHIPPENDALE STYLE

The aristocrat among American furniture types is without question the Philadelphia piece in the Chippendale style made from about 1760 to 1790¹, and it is the aim of every museum and private collector to come into the possession of examples of these distinguished highboys, lowboys, chests-on-chests and chairs. The

form so decided a contrast to the simpler New England pieces that there is never any doubt of their provenance. For Philadelphia-made furniture is distinctive in line, proportion, and particularly in carving, which reached its highest point during the Chippendale period.

The lowboy presented by Mr. Tanna-



LOWBOY
PHILADELPHIA, C. 1760
GIFT OF MR. ROBERT H. TANNAHILL

Detroit Museum is therefore deeply indebted to Mr. Robert H. Tannahill for his generous gift of a superb example of this type of furniture, a mahogany lowboy characteristic in every detail of the finest of the Philadelphia pieces, which

hill has a beautifully carved, recessed-shell motive on the lower middle drawer, encircled by scrolled leafage, with the smaller convex shell of the earlier period on the center of the apron below it.² A rather unusual feature is the incised

1. It has been quite definitely determined that just as the style was considerably later in becoming established in the Colonies, so it remained in vogue much longer here than in England, and a number of Chippendale style pieces are known of as late a date as 1790.
2. This squared finish is a very characteristic feature of the Philadelphia Chippendale pieces of chairs and is one of the points of difference between American and English pieces of the period.

carving across the apron and the squared instead of arched treatment of the edge of the apron midway between the shell and legs. The knee of the leg has the typical acanthus leaf carving and the legs end in the claw with the *flattened* ball, which is also a definitely Philadelphia feature. The contrast in the tone and graining of the wood of which the different parts of the lowboy are made gives great beauty to the surface and is a fine instance of the charm which mahogany assumes with the passing of time, when left untouched.

It is unfortunate that so little is known of the Philadelphia craftsmen of this period. If the habit of signing fine pieces of furniture, which prevailed during this century in France, had only been adopted here, how much fruitless speculation might have been saved! And now that it has been discovered¹ that even William Savery, the one Philadelphia craftsman of whom we used to feel so sure that it became the custom to ascribe to him all of the more elaborate pieces in the Chippendale style, produced the simpler type of furniture rather than these profusely-carved pieces, we are indeed at sea and must wait either for more signed pieces to come to light, or for some hitherto buried documents to be unearthed before it will be possible to assign pieces in this style (other than the few labeled pieces which exist) with

definiteness to Gillingham, Gostelow, Thomas Tufft or Benjamin Randolph. It would be of much interest to know, for example, which of the American cabinet makers were responsible for the development of these later highboys and lowboys which are so distinctively a Colonial product, passing out of favor in England after the Queen Anne period, the highboy to have its place taken by the chest of drawers and the lowboy by the "knee-hole" dressing table of pedestal type, or the later much lighter one, with hinged top fitted with toilet compartments and mirror, modelled after the contemporary French pieces.

It is interesting to note in this connection that though we call this type of lowboy "Chippendale" style there is nothing like it to be found in his "Director," the nearest pieces being the commode chest of drawers and the dressing table in the French style, both of which differ considerably from the American lowboy in form and show neither the shell motive, which went quite generally out of fashion in England by 1745, nor the ball and claw foot, which is not to be found on any of the "Director" pieces, (though of course used by the English cabinet makers who worked in his style), showing that American cabinet makers by no means slavishly copied the Chippendale style but used considerable ingenuity in developing types of their own.

JOSEPHINE WALTHER.

A BYZANTINE BROCADE

The Textile Department has acquired as a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ernst Rosenfeld, New York, a fine panel of Byzantine brocade.

On a ground of twill, gold ribbons outlined with red silk, form an all-over pattern of interconnected circular medallions. These contain the cross and monogram of Christ; the spandrels are filled with cherubs' heads and a six-pointed star ornaments the gold disk between the medallions.

1. See October *Bulletin*, p. 11.

The intertwined ribbon pattern forming medallions appears in Byzantine art as early as the fourth century (Rome, S. Costanza, mosaic of the vault). We find it at Ravenna in the floor mosaic of Theodoric's palace, on the capitals and choir screens of San Vitale, on the silver cross of S. Agnello, and also on the eleventh century floor mosaic of S. Marco, Venice. It occurs on a wooden door of Georgian workmanship of about the year 1000 in the museum at Tiflis,

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and on the ivory covers of the psalter of Queen Melisanda (Brit. Mus. Egerton, 1139). The derivation from a textile pattern, such as the Alexandrian silk fabric with the Annunciation and Nativity in the Vatican Museum, is obvious.

Our panel shows close affinity to a fabric reproduced on plate 54 of Lessing's *Gewebesammlung des K. Kunstgewerbe-Museums zu Berlin*, where the gold pattern is outlined in blue on a red ground. The spandrels are here filled with flowery crosses, the disks in the twists not decorated. Lessing mentions Mount Athos as the possible place of manufacture, while Falke (*Seidenweberei*, Vol. II, p. 7, note 3) calls it a Russian brocade. Lessing's date, the seventeenth century, appears rather late for our specimen, which is distinguished by a sturdier and more elaborate pattern, and probably belongs to the early sixteenth century. The cherubs' heads are related to the large mosaic cherubs of the cross vaults at Cefalù (Glück, *Christliche Kunst des Ostens*, 101), and the cloisonné enamels on the silver frame of the *Madonna of Chachuli* at Gelat (ibid. 125). These latter are inscribed in Greek letters as seraphs and have, like their larger brothers at Cefalù, wings of peacock feathers. Both monuments date from the second quarter of the twelfth century. Our cherubs' wings are crossed in the same manner; even the soft downy feathers on the inner side of the large wings are indicated. The peacock markings are omitted, possibly replaced by the small gold markings around the cherubs.

After the fall of Constantinople in



BYZANTINE BROCADE
GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. ERNST ROSENFELD

1453, textiles for ecclesiastical use were woven in the monasteries of Mount Athos, in Bulgaria and in Russia. It is difficult to assign a special place of manufacture to a fabric of this class today.

ADELE COULIN WEIBEL.

PUBLISHED MONTHLY, OCTOBER TO MAY, INCLUSIVE, AT THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS OF THE CITY OF DETROIT. ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE POST OFFICE AT DETROIT, MICHIGAN, UNDER THE ACT OF OCTOBER 3, 1917.

BULLETIN OF THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

CALENDAR OF LECTURES AND SPECIAL EVENTS

SUNDAY AFTERNOON TALKS

LECTURE HALL AT 3:30 P. M.

January 5, 3:30 P. M. "Two American Artists: Gari Melchers and C. Y. Turner," by Ralph Morris, Educational Secretary.

January 12, 3:30 P. M. "Personal Reactions to the Michigan Artists Show," by Paul Honoré.

January 19, 3:30 P. M. "Some New Chinese Accessions," by Benjamin March, Curator of Asiatic Art.

January 26, 3:30 P. M. "Contemporary German Prints," by Isabel Weadock, Curator of Prints.

Music furnished by The Chamber Music Society

TUESDAY EVENING LECTURES AND MUSICALES

January 7, 8:15 P. M. "Music at the Time of Napoleon." Lecture by Frank Bishop, Curator of Music.

January 14, 8:15 P. M. "Art and Citizenship." Lecture by Ian B. Stoughton Holbourn, Carleton College.

January 21, 8:15 P. M. "Beethoven and His Epoch." Concert by Frank Bishop, Curator of Music.

FRIDAY EVENING ORGAN RECITALS

AUDITORIUM AT 8:15 P. M.

January 10, 8:15 P. M. Dr. Alle D. Zuidema.

January 17, 8:15 P. M. Edwin Kraft, of Cleveland, Ohio.

January 24, 8:15 P. M. Evelyn Gurwitch and Frank Bishop.

MARIONETTE PLAY

AUDITORIUM, FRIDAY EVENING, JANUARY 31, AT 8:15 P. M.

For the Members of the Founders' Society

Three Ballets: Mozart's "Les Petite Reins," Freund and McPharlin's "Tower with Terraces," and John Alden Carpenter's "Krazy Kat."

Designed and presented by Paul McPharlin.

SATURDAY MORNING PHOTOPLAYS FOR CHILDREN

AUDITORIUM AT 10:15 P. M.

January 11, 10:15 A. M. "The Gorgon's Head."

January 18, 10:15 A. M. "The Daily Life of the Egyptians."

January 25, 10:15 A. M. "The Temples and Tombs of Ancient Egypt."

CURRENT EXHIBITIONS

Exhibition of Contemporary German Graphic Art, December 15-January 15.
Annual Exhibition of Michigan Artists, January 3-January 30.